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SONGS OF THE
HOLY LAND.

EDINBURGH.

M.DCCC.XLVI.

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IN the revival, and amongst the many skilful imitations of our old Minstrelsy, it seems strange that the themes and inspiration of so few modern lays should have been drawn from the Hebrew Scriptures. Yet the learned agree that the narrative of Moses is not excelled by those of Herodotus or Livy; that neither the Seneschal of Champagne, nor the Canon of Chimay, have surpassed the pictured pages of Samuel and the Chroniclers of Israel; and that the lofty strains of David and the Prophets, disdain comparison with the early poetry of any ancient or modern language.

These humble versions of several familiar passages of sacred song and story, were chiefly written in the lands to which

they relate. They are memorials of the pleasant months in 1842, when the writer “took to himself his curtains, his vessels, and his camels,” and became “a dweller in tents” by the Red Sea, and in the deserts of Sinai and Seir—when he rode over the plains of Jericho, and climbed to cedars of Solomon—“the trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon”—and spent many a tranquil evening in the cloisters of the Holy Land, especially with those worthy friars whose hospitable palace crowns the brow, and is the chief “excellency,” of Carmel. To two of the following pieces he has ventured to add a few verses, descriptive of the scene or incident which suggested their subjects to his mind; and in all he has endeavoured to use, as far as possible, the language of the English Bible.

CHRISTMAS, 1845.

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THE WIVING OF ISAAC.

GENESIS, CHAP. XXIV.

I.

NOW Abraham the Hebrew
Is stricken well in age,
And the Lord his God hath prosper'd him
In all his pilgrimage ;
Yet to his kindred far away,
The old man's heart doth yearn,
And to that good and pleasant land
Where he may not return ;

His father's tent and pasturing flock,
In nightly dreams he sees,
On the plain amidst the rivers,
In Ur of the Chaldees ;
And for his son, his Sarah's son,
The hope his heart within,
Is, ere he die, to wive him
With a maiden of his kin.

II.

It is the ancient steward,
To him his lord doth say :
“ Now by the God of earth and heaven,
Swear me an oath I pray—
A righteous oath that thou wilt take
For wife unto my son,
No Canaanitish damsel
Of the land wherein we won ;

“ Nor lure him to my fatherland,
From out the portion given
Unto our seed for evermore,
By the Lord God of heaven ;
But a daughter of my people
Thou shalt bring unto his bed.”
That servant true hath sworn to do,
The thing his Lord hath said.

III.

Ere dawn rose Eliezer,
Ere the crowing of the cock,—
And camels ten he chose him then,
The fairest of the flock—
And o’er the orient mountain,
His journey he hath ta’en,
And met the rosy morning
On Gomorrah’s blasted plain ;

And o'er the fruitful land of palms,
Where milk-white Jordan flow'd
Through sunny glades, mid' oaken shades,
Where kine of Bashan low'd ;
Through peopled vales and desert dales,
Where man nor beast abode,
For many a day still onward
To the golden east he rode.

IV.

At last the weary way is sped ;
The ray of morning quivers
Athwart a plain, with cities spread,
And girt with glorious rivers.
And in the cool of evening,
He stays him by the well
Of reverend Nahor's city,
Where Abraham's people dwell :

About the time that maidens use
To come for water there ;—
Then, his camels kneeling near him,
The pilgrim prays a pray'r,
That she who first should quench his thirst,
A damsel kind and fair,
The same should be the chosen she,
Must wed his master's heir.

v.

Lo ! while he yet was speaking,
Did glide the pathway down,
With pitcher on her comely head,
A daughter of the town,
In whose clear brow and winning eyes
Dark-glancing, ye might see
The light of guileless maidenhood,
Serene and fancy-free.

So Eliezer craved a draught,
Beside the fountain's brink,
Whereat her pitcher to his lip
She held, and pray'd him drink :
And water for his camels
She drew, ere he besought her ;
For kind as fair Rebekah was,
Bethuel's gentle daughter.

VI.

So when his beasts had drunk their fill,
A golden jewel brave,
And bracelets of the weighty gold,
To her the pilgrim gave :
And ask'd her of her parentage,
And if an old man might
Within the dwelling of her sire,
Find lodging for the night.

But, when he knew her Nahor's seed,
And of his master's kin,
And heard that he and his might bide
Her father's house within—
Thankful, he bow'd his hoary head,
And bless'd and prais'd the Lord,
Who o'er his servant's wanderings
Kept gracious watch and ward.

VII.

Swiftly the damsel hied her home,
The tidings there to tell,
And swift her brother Laban
Ran down unto the well,
And to the aged stranger
Kind words of greeting spake,
And brought him home, right welcome,
For the God of Abrah'm's sake ;

Gave for his camels provender,
Gave water for his feet,
And serv'd him with fair courtesy,
And set before him meat.
But the leal earnest messenger,
Of needful cheer would none,
Till his errand he had spoken,
And his master's bidding done.

VIII.

So of Abraham, their brother,
And his hopeful heir he told,
And how his God had plenish'd him
With flocks, and herds, and gold ;
And that with no strange daughter
Of the land he sojourn'd in,
The sire would wed the son, but with
A maiden of his kin ;

How from the west, on this behest,
Came he to Nahor's well ;
And of his prayer and musings there,
And all that there befel ;—
“ Now, if ye will deal kindly
With my good lord and me,
Give me,” he said, “ this courteous maid,
Her kinsman's bride to be.”

IX.

Rebekah's sire and brother bold,
They bow'd them to the token ;
“ Take ye the maid,” they answered,
“ For 'tis the Lord hath spoken.”
Glad heart had Eliezer
When he heard the welcome word,
And bow'd him on the earth alow,
In homage to the Lord ;

And owches of the silver fair,
And many a golden jewel,
And gorgeous raiment, gave he
To the daughter of Bethuel—
And precious gifts to all her house ;
Then free from care and cumber,
Right joyously he feasted well,
And peacefully did slumber.

x.

He made him bowne at morning prime,
For he would not be stay'd,
Though Laban long entreated,
And sore the mother pray'd ;
So they blessed their young Rebekah,
And the fruit her womb should bear,
And to the stranger's land she rode,
Beneath the stranger's care

(One ancient woman with her,
Had nurs'd her at the breast,)
On a fair and stately camel,
Wending ever to the west,
And the level sun of evening
On her snowy brow did glow,
When wreaths of rosy light he flung
O'er Hermon's crest of snow.

XI.

Went Isaac forth to meditate
At balmy eventide,
When lo ! that hour the camels came,
Were bearing home his bride,
Came onward from the wilderness,
Between the opening fells,
With soft and solemn motion,
And music low of bells ;

A white-veil'd maiden after,
Came bashfully and slow,
And the bridegroom's heart was comforted
Her comeliness to know ;
And soon within his mother's bow'r,
His gentle fluttering dove
Unveil'd the glory of her eyes,
And yielded to his love.

Beside the city Hebron,
Beneath an olive-tree,
In sweet May-eve, a pilgrim sate,
Had come from o'er the sea.
His camels all ungirded graz'd,
Or rested on the green,
Hard by a turban'd company
Of wild-eyed Bedouin ;—

And looking on the holy walls
And towers, so grim and grey,
Where Abraham and Sarah sleep—
As Moslem sages say—
To wile the time, in simple rhyme
Of ancient northern lay,
He tun'd this sweet and simple tale
Of the old pastoral day.

J A E L.

JUDGES, CHAP. IV. AND V.

I.

NOW was there rest in Ramah, in holy Bethel calm,
And Barak sate with Deborah, beneath her peaceful
palm ;

And o'er that goodly canopy, their choral song arose
To the Lord, who gave them victory, and Israel's land repose.
Who smote the might of Amalek in Kishon's pleasant dale,
And bow'd the neck of Sisera beneath the foot of Jael.

II.

“ Blessed above women shall the spouse of Heber be—
Of all the Kenite families the noblest matron she ;
For vain had Barak’s valour been, his people to deliver,
And Kishon redly flowing, that ancient angry river ;
Had womanly compassion made weak the hand of Jael,
Who wielded well the hammer—who drove the deadly nail.

III.

“ By the waters of Megiddo, where the battle-cry was loud,
And their horses’ hoofs were broken by the prancings of the
proud—
Though Reuben with his flocks abode, and Dan beside his
galleys,
Nor succour came from Asher’s shore, nor Gilead’s flow’ry
valleys—
The righteous cause o’er Canaan’s kings did mightily prevail ;
But woman’s arm the glory won—the stedfast arm of Jael.

IV.

“Stout Zebulun and Naphtali, they came with spear and sword,
And to the death fought valiantly the battle of the Lord ;
And the great captain Sisera, with clouds of horsemen came,
Nine hundred iron chariots, and chiefs of royal name ;
But horse, nor iron chariot, nor host could aught avail
Against the frowning stars of heaven—against the might of
Jael.

V.

“From that field of shame and slaughter—at the going down
of day—
Of all his host proud Sisera alone had fled away :
Escaping through the wilderness, afoot the warrior came
Unto the land of Kedesh, and the plain of Zaanaim ;
With travel worn and weary, and with fear and fasting
pale,
He stood in suppliant fashion by the lonely tent of Jael.

VI.

“ She hail’d him, like a conqueror, with reverence bowing low ;
And courteously entreated him within her tent to go,
And all her desert dainties she spread before him there,
And butter brought in lordly dish, and milk in flagon fair.
So peacefully he made his cheer, and soon, in dinted mail,
He laid him down to slumber on a couch was deck’d by Jael.

VII.

“ But when his eyes were heavy, then soft arose the dame,
With hammer and with tent-pin strong, unto his side she
 came ;
And through his dreaming temples she smote the iron cold,
And quench’d the fiery life within his bosom fierce and bold.
So he, was vauntful Canaan’s boast, and widow’d Israel’s bale,
Did bow him in his blood, and fall before the feet of Jael.

VIII.

“ His mother at her lattice doth watch and list’ning wait—
‘ Why tarry now his chariot-wheels—oh ! why so long and
late ?
‘ The spoil they are dividing, and all in order share
The comely captive damsels, and embroider’d garments rare’—
Made answer her wise ladies, with fond and flattering tale,
Nor ween’d that cold their hero lay within the bow’r of Jael.

IX.

“ Blessed above women shall the wife of Heber be,
Of all that ancient lineage, the noblest mother she ;
For vain had Barak’s valour been, his people to deliver—
Though Kishon old to ocean roll’d a red and roaring river—
Had womanly relentings made weak the hand of Jael,
Who plied the workman hammer well—who drove the deadly
nail.”

JEPHTHAH'S VOW.

JUDGES, CHAP. XI.

I.

“**G**LORY now to Judah's Lion,
Chemosh he hath quell'd in war,
Broken is the pride of Sihon,
Quench'd the light of Ammon's star;
Moab's towns and vines are burning,
Gilead sleeps in sunny calm;
For our hero home returning,
Strike the timbrel, strew the palm.”

II.

Sweetly swell those virgin voices,
Sweet the silver timbrels aid,
In the blooming van rejoices,
Carols clear one fair-hair'd maid :
On before them all she dances,
As the warrior band comes nigher,
For her blue bewitching glances
Starlike fall upon her sire.

III.

Now her loving arms have found him ;
But the chieftain weepeth sore,
Mute the mail-clad men around him
Stand with eyes all running o'er.
To his bosom, anguish-laden,
He enfolds her piteously,
Inly groaning ; each soft maiden
Wonders, weeps, and trembles by.

IV.

Sadly slow did Jephthah falter,
 " Daughter mine, alas for thee !
Vow'd have I unto the altar
 First whate'er should welcome me."
To his bursting sorrow list'ning,
 Lily-like the maiden grew,
Wet with tears her blue eyes glist'ning,
 Look'd for help to heaven as blue.

V.

Said she, with sweet voice unshaken,
 " Do according to thy vow,
Forasmuch as God hath taken
 Vengeance upon Ammon now.
Only o'er the mountains yonder,
 Two moons in their solitude,
Let me with my fellows wander,
 And bewail my maidenhood."

VI.

Groan'd amen ! the chief embracing
Her, his lost, his only child.
Up and down the mountain pacing
Her young train went weeping wild,
Till the months of moan were over,
Then return'd they wailing loud ;
And the sire, who so did love her,
Did with her as he had vow'd.

VII.

Ne'er warm lover woo'd or wore her,
Meek she died in maiden bloom ;
Gentle virgins all deplore her,
Deck with flow'rs her virgin tomb.
Her remembrance Gilead dearly
Cherishes since long ago ;
Still the maids of Israel yearly
For her sake lamenting go.

RIZPAH THE CONCUBINE.

2 SAMUEL, CHAP. XXI.

I.

LO! the mighty corses on the rock of Jabesh hoary,
Mighty corses seven, of warriors strong and tall,
Erst they went in purple, and dwelt in ease and glory,
For they were seven princes of the royal blood of Saul.

II.

They died not like the mighty, where deadly strife was keenest,
In the forefront of the battle, in the leaguer'd city's flame,
But on th' accursed gallows, they perish'd like the meanest,
And Saul's belov'd Gibeah beheld his children's shame.

III.

For the pinching years of famine, said the seers, were sent by
heaven,

Because that Saul had smitten in his zeal the Gibeonite,
Who crav'd as equal ransom of his wrong, these lordlings seven,
And hang'd them in Gibeah, when barley fields grew white.

IV.

Now side by side the victims, in the sleep that hath no dreaming,
Naked beneath the heaven in storm and sunshine lie ;
Morn and even vultures sail around them screaming,
And prowlers from the wilderness at night around them cry.

V.

But vulture's beak, nor famish'd fang of wolf invades them
sleeping,
Only the worm doth riot, unseen, upon their clay ;
For kneeling near her slaughter'd sons, a mother watches
weeping,
And scares the flocking fowls of noon and nightly beasts away.

VI.

These fallen ones had brethren, and friends they lov'd as
brothers,

And followers very many in their day of honour fled,
And the witching love of women, but none was like their
mother's,

Whose heart did most remember when all forgot them dead.

VII.

In the palace Millo, seem'd it a marvel and a wonder

To the mighty men of valour, and the courtiers every one,
That Rizpah from her children nor shame nor death could
sunder,

So it was told King David what the concubine had done.

THE LAMENT OF SOLOMON.

ECCLESIASTES, CHAP. I.

VANITY of vanities ! thus mourn'd the Hebrew King,
Vexation is and vanity, the sum of every thing ;
And all is full of labour, and void of profit here,
Seeing not satisfies the eye, nor hearing fills the ear ;
Nor is there hope or memory, or change beneath the sun,
We are but as our fathers were, and do as they have done.
My heart I gave to wisdom, and garner'd all her lore,
But as my store of knowledge grew, so grew my sorrows' store.

I madden'd me with foolish mirth, I made me drunk with wine,
I builded stately palaces, I planted many a vine,
And wide and fair my gardens were, with all their pleasant trees,
And clear and cool each plenteous pool, I digg'd to water these ;
The thing was surely never, I did from me withhold,
Servants I gat me, flocks and herds, the silver and the gold,
All instruments of music, all kind of tuneful voices,
All that delights the eye and ear, or sense and soul rejoices ;
Some joy was in the gathering, but when I look'd upon
The perfect fruit of all my toil, behold, the joy was gone !
So I abhorr'd my labour, for I knew not who should rule
O'er all my glory after me, a wise man or a fool ;
And life itself I hated, for our universal doom,
That wisdom shall, like folly, lie forgotten in the tomb ;
And for that all our days are care, and all our travail grief,
And night hath no tranquillity, no solace or relief ;
For vanity and sorrow, is the sum of every thing—
Vanity of vanities, said Solomon the King.

THE BURDEN OF TYRE.

ISAIAH, CHAP. XXIII., XXIV. ; EZEKIEL, CHAP. XXVI., XXVII., XXVIII.

1.

CRY ye and howl! thus saith the Lord,
Make bitter lamentations
For Tyre, the glory of the isles,
The mart of all the nations,
The crowning city, thronéd
Like a queen at ocean's gate,
Of old renown in ancient days,
The beautiful, the great !

Who reap'd the harvest of the seas,
And spoil'd the mighty deep,
The fair and joyous city—
Oh wail ye now and weep !

II.

On dark Senir the pines were fell'd
To build her lofty galleys,
For sweeping oars the oaks of eld
In Bashan's forest valleys ;
Her rowers sat on sumptuous banks
Of ivory richly wrought,
By Assur's roving company,
From isles of Chittim brought ;
And gave for masts green Lebānon
Each goodliest cedar tree,
To bend beneath a gorgeous sail
Of Memphian broidery.

III.

Oh city ! glorious were thy walls,
Thy crown of royal towers,
Where shield and spear of Arvad shone
Of Persia's vassal powers ;
Thy streets that stream-like ever flow'd
With life, and song, and mirth ;
Thy famous marts, whose traffickers
Were princes of the earth ;
Thy haven wide, where thronging came
The sails of all the sea,
Wafting the treasure and the toil
Of every land to thee.

IV.

The splendid south her spices gave,
Her blazing gems and gold ;
Thine were the flocks of Araby,
And steeds renown'd of old ;

The cunning thine of Syria's hand,
In works of rare device,
Purple of kings in cedar stor'd
And broidery of price ;
Bright vintages and comely slaves,
And ore from 'Tubal's mine,
And the milk and honey flowing
Through pleasant Palestine.

v.

Wealth, wisdom, beauty! thine were all
The gifts that men desire,
But pride of these, it wrought thy fall,
Oh high and haughty Tyre !
“ Lo, I am God, and gloriously
I reign amidst the seas ;”
Thou saidest in an evil hour
Of wantonness and ease ;

Then, by the Lord in fiery wrath,
Thy doom of woe was spoken,
Thy perfect beauty all despoil'd,
Thy strength and valour broken.

VI.

Behold, the embattled nations come
In terrible array !
Thee shall their alien hands defile,
Their cruel steel shall slay—
Leaving no mark nor monument
Of thy imperial state,
But destruction in the city,
Desolation at the gate,
And fire and wasting pestilence,
Thy shatter'd walls within ;
So shall the Lord abase thy pride,
And purge thy people's sin.

VII.

Thy mirth of music and of wine
Hath ceased for evermore,
No sound, save voice of wailing, wakes
Thy solitary shore,
Of merchant, pilot, mariner,
The princes of the sea,
Gather'd from isles and kingdoms far,
All weeping sore for thee ;
In sackcloth and in ashes,
Making lamentation dire,
“ Ah, for our golden city,
Alas, alas for Tyre !”

VIII.

Like the shakings of an olive,
Like the gleanings of a vine,
The remnants of thy lordly race,
Amidst thy ruins pine ;

Like harlot in her waning hour,
Have men forgotten thee ;
Thy harp hath lost its ancient pow'r
Of magic melody.
But by the earth and sounding sea,
Shall ever be ador'd,
And magnified the majesty
And glory of the Lord.

So sang the ancient bards divine ;
A pilgrim mus'd their lay,
Breathing his weary steed at noon
Of Syrian summer day ;
A pilgrim from the Holy Land,
Where the blessed feet had trod,
Full eighteen hundred years ago,
Of the meek Son of God ;
Who had felt the breeze on Tabor,
The sun on Zion hill,
And bath'd in milky Jordan's flow,
And drunk of Siloa's rill.

And now in silken Syria,
He halts the strand upon,
Where Sidon's daughter Assur brav'd,
And him of Macedon.
Beneath the mountains many a league
Of melancholy plain

Stretch their wild solitudes, beside
The lone and desert main ;
And by that main, like stranded wreck
Cast forth in ocean's ire,
The lowly fishing hamlet lies,
That once was mighty Tyre.

Crowning a rough and grassy knoll,
A fortress desolate,
(No banner on the battlement,
No warder at the gate,)
Some shatter'd column lying
Midst sun-burnt weeds of June,
(Erst in Syene's rosy rock,
Or marble Atlas hewn ;)
And here and there a fragment huge
Of ancient wall between,—
Scarce mark the grandly storied spot,
Where pride and pow'r have been.

No cottage breaks yon weary flats,
No bark yon winding shore—
Where sparkl'd marble palaces,
Where navies rode, of yore ;
Beside this moss-grown fountain,
Beneath the fig-tree's shade,
There are no children sporting,
Nor any ling'ring maid ;
And sign of life the voiceless town
Hath other none at all,
Save yellow plague-flags drooping
O'er crumbling port and wall.

SHALLUM.

JEREMIAH, CHAP. XXII. V. 10-12.

I.

OH waste not thy woe on the dead, nor bemoan him
Who finds with his fathers the grave of his rest ;
Sweet slumber is his, who at night-fall hath thrown him
Near bosoms that waking, did love him the best.

II.

But sorely bewail him, the weary world-ranger,
Shall ne'er to the land of his people return ;
His weeping-worn eyes shall be clos'd by the stranger,
No dew-drop of sorrow shall hallow his urn.

III.

And mourn for the monarch that went out of Zion,
King Shallum, the son of Josiah the just ;
For he the cold bed of the captive shall die on,
Afar from his realm, nor return to its dust.

THE ASSYRIAN.

EZEKIEL, CHAP. XXXI.

LIKE a cedar on the mountain,
Stood the Assyrian proud,
Full long and fair his branches were,
Far-shadowing was his shroud ;
And tow'ring o'er the forest,
And its giants every one,
From forth thick boughs his stately head
Shot upwards to the sun.

For of the deep he drank his fill,
And many a bounteous river
Refresh'd his roots, with rivulets
Of pleasant murmur, ever.
Came birds at eve in clouds from heaven,
To nest his boughs among,
Secure the wild beast whelp'd beneath.
And rear'd its savage young.
So great and fair he flourish'd there,
No comely cedar tree
In all the garden of the Lord,
Was beautiful as he ;
Not the rich chestnut in the dale,
Nor pine upon the height,
Could match the arms he wav'd abroad,
In majesty and might ;
He stood the envy and the pride
Of Eden's greenwood glade,
And mighty nations dwelt within
The covert of his shade.

But God look'd down from heaven, and spake ;
Hear ye the words he said :
“ Because he hath exalted so
The glory of his head,
And for his heart uplifted,
And the wrongs that he hath done,
I give him to the heathen,
Unto their mighty one—
To the terrible of nations,
And the alien is he given ;
Fell'd shall his waving honours be,
His beauty wreck'd and riven,
His arms of pride, that spread so wide,
And battled with the gale,
All scatter'd on the mountain's side,
And strew'd along the vale ;
The rivers erst that slak'd his thirst,
Shall sweep his spoils away,
And all that boasted in his strength,
Shall flee at his dismay.

The beasts that lov'd his shadow
On his haughty crest shall browze,
The birds around his ruin wheel
That nestled in his boughs.
On the mountain shall be mourning,
And drooping sorrow seize
The choice and best of Lebanon,
Fair Eden's goodly trees ;
And the nations shall be shaken,
And shall tremble at the fall
Of him that was the greatest,
And the proudest of them all.

THE VALLEY OF BONES.

EZEKIEL, CHAP. XXXVIII.

I.

IN the spirit of the Highest, and guided by His hand,
I came into a valley in a visionary land;
Not like that pleasant valley where gentle Siloa flows,
That sings for joy and gladness, and blossoms like the rose,
But a dreary mountain hollow, where the earth was overspread
With skulls and ghastly skeletons, and ruins of the dead;
Like some great den of lions old, or ancient field of fight,
But thicklier strew'd with bleached bones, all sere and snowy
white.

II.

There genial show'rs and stars of heaven could no sweet influence bring,

There no awak'ning was at morn, no stirring in the spring ;

There stoop'd no sailing eagle, nor forest-prowler found

A morsel for her hungry brood, in all the host around ;

And as the spirit led me o'er the bone-encumber'd soil,

Strong limbs were crush'd beneath my heel, like autumn's leafy spoil ;

Then spake the Lord, " Oh ! son of man, can these forgotten dead

Live, and these bones arise again ?" " Thou knowest, Lord," I said.

III.

Straight the Spirit came upon me, I was filled with the word—

" Oh, hear ye now, dry bones !" I cried, " the bidding of the Lord :

Behold, your breath shall come again, and sinews as of yore,
And flesh and skin shall cover you, and ye shall live once
more."

And, lo ! there was a shaking, and I heard a murmuring
tone,

As stirr'd and came together each bone unto his bone ;
And crept o'er every skeleton the sinews and the flesh,
Till all lay pale, in that dreary dale, like corpses warm and
fresh.

IV.

Again the pow'r was on me, aloud I cried again,
" Come from the winds of heaven, oh, breath ! and breathe
upon the slain !"

So life awoke in all the host, they rose up where they lay,
And stood and gaz'd upon me, an exceeding great array ;
Then said the Lord, " Oh, son of man ! my people now be-
hold,

Who sadly cry our bones are dry, our ancient hope is cold,

And know that sure my promise is, and strong mine arm to
save

From the bondage of the heathen, from the fetters of the
grave."

JUDITH.

JUDITH, CHAP. VII. TO XVI.

I.

“**T**HE mountain of thy might,
And the ramparts on its height,
And thy sheen of serried lances,
Bethulia ! are vain :
Think ye our feeble band
May the iron host withstand
That smote the Median monarch
In lofty Ecbatayne.”

II.

The Assyrian and his powers,
From Geba's hoary towers
To the sea-beat rock of Carmel,
Waste the valleys and enthal ;
Around our fountains clear
Camps the traitor brood of Seir,
And the death of thirst, terrific
Doth slay within our wall.

III.

“ Why should our women die,
With sweet lips black and dry ?
What pang of sharper anguish,
Shall the sword of foeman bring ?
Vain buckler is and bow,
Each tower an idle show,
Yield we to Holofernes
And serve the Assyrian king !”

IV.

So fiercely swells and high
The madden'd city's cry ;
Then Ozias, woeful chieftain,
And his councillors debate ;
In morns and ev'nings five,
If hope nor help arrive,
To the host of the Assyrian
They swear to yield the gate.

V.

Within Bethulia there,
Wonn'd a widow rich and fair,
In good report of all men,
In fasting much and pray'r ;
Since her lord to death was done
By the fierce stroke of the sun,
A tent had been her dwelling
And sackcloth weed her wear.

VI.

Unto that tender dame,
At her urgent bidding, came
Ozias and the ancients,
And she to them did say—
“To-night, beside the gate,
My going forth await,
For I a deed will venture
Shall be had in mind alway.

VII.

“The thing that I will dare
I may not now declare ;
But to his chosen people,
By this weak hand of mine,
The Lord shall show His grace,
Within the appointed space.”
So the elders pray’d Jehovah
To prosper her design.

VIII.

Through Salem's fane of gold
The evening incense roll'd ;
And the cry of the lone woman,
 To the God whom she did serve,
Within her shaded bow'r
Rose fervently that hour,
That he would steel her bosom,
 Her arm with valour nerve.

IX.

Putting ashes off and sadness,
Like a bride in garb of gladness
To the gate she pass'd at even,
 With a faithful waiting-maid ;
A tire of jewels rare
Deck'd her dark and braided hair,
And her form, all eyes alluring,
 Was gorgeously array'd.

X.

The multitude stood dumb
To see fair Judith come ;
On her bravery and beauty
The ancients gaz'd intent,
As less'ning down the mountain
Towards the leaguer'd fountain,
With fearless step and qucenly,
So beautiful she went.

XI.

The fierce and ribald guard
Around the wells kept ward,
Her sweet face made them gentle
Tho' passage they debarr'd ;
Their lord she crav'd to see,
And they led her courteously,
Whilst thiek'ning throngs around her,
Their going did retard.

XII.

Grew Israel much in honour
With the aliens gazing on her ;
Said the soldiery of Assur,
 “ Who this people would despise ?
’Tis a noble stock we wiss,
Breeds women like to this,
That might hold the world in bondage
 By the prowess of their eyes.”

XIII.

From his couch with purple hung,
Where gold and emeralds flung
A starry radiance o’er him,
 Great Holofernes rose ;
And lamps of silver bright
Diffuse a pearly light,
As forth of his pavilion
 To meet the dame he goes.

xiv.

His heart was captive ta'en,
And her beauty fir'd his brain,
As in reverence before him
To the earth she bent her brow ;
And in soft accents pray'd he
The lone and lovely lady
To chase all apprehension
From her gentle bosom now.

xv.

Her fair form he did raise,
And through the silver blaze
Like a crownéd queen he led her
To his pavilion fair ;
And fondly lean'd his ear
To her voice so low and clear,
As her purpose she unfolded
And featly spread her snare.

XVI.

“ From yonder weeping town,”
She said, “ I am come down,
For well I wot destruction
To her is drawing nigh ;
In the day of Israel’s sin
His sorrow doth begin—
When his children leave obeying
The law of the Most High.

XVII.

“ Tho’ Assur’s banner brave
On Ecbatayne did wave,
No mortal might or valour
May win Bethulia’s wall ;
But priests have dar’d to palter
With the offerings of the altar
In the hour of need, and vengeance
On all the land must fall.

XVIII.

“ And now my lord shall ride,
His handmaid for a guide,
To holiest Jerusalem,
And there victorious reign.”
At the tidings of the dame
Great joy and marvel came,
For her wisdom and her beauty,
To the chieftain and his train.

XIX.

If sooth she said, he swore
Jehovah to adore,
And in his master's palace
Should be her dwelling-place.
Meanwhile the tented field
Did goodly lodging yield,
So the widow with the foeman
Abode a three days' space.

XX.

Like airy vision bright
She glided forth at night,
Of all the guard unchalleng'd,
For pray'r and adoration ;
And bath'd her in the pool
Of Bethulia's fountain, full
Of stars as was her bosom
Of holy meditation.

XXI.

When the fourth ev'ning came,
Holofernes did proclaim
A feast to all his servants
That were of Assur's line ;
And purposing that eve
Sweet Judith to deceive,
He bade her to the banquet
To brighten more the wine.

XXII.

To his pavilion wide,
In all her beauty's pride,
In all her pomp of raiment,
Consentingly she came.
Then burning to enjoy her,
The false and fell destroyer
With many a ruby goblet
His lust did more enflame.

XXIII.

So when the feast was done
And guests and menials gone,
Beneath his purple canopy
Opprest with wine he lay ;
Then earnest rose the pray'r
Of lonely Judith there,
" Oh God of Israel, strengthen
This arm of mine to-day !"

XXIV.

From the pillar of the bed
Anigh the sleeper's head,
She took his gleaming faulchion
And grasp'd him by the hair ;
And twice into his throat
The cold keen blade she smote,
And the bleeding head uplifted
With eyes of glassy glare.

XXV.

And the body welling o'er
With hot and bubbling gore,
Disdainfully she pluck'd it
From off the broider'd bed ;
And the jewell'd pall hung o'er it,
Adown in scorn she tore it,
And with her grisly burden
Went forth with stately tread.

XXVI.

Her maid, without did wait,
Receiv'd the head, elate,
And through the sleeping army
They pass'd beneath the moon,
Beside the guarded rill,
And clomb the silent hill,
And at Bethulia's portal
Stood safe and joyful soon.

XXVII.

At Judith's cheering voice
The warders did rejoice,
And forth amain to meet her
The priest and elders sped ;
And lo, in the red glare
Of fire was kindled there,
The dame's white hand upholding
The grim Assyrian's head !

XXVIII.

On that trophy of emprise,
And its pale and sunken eyes,
Fix'd on the city's rampart,
The smiles of morning play ;
The troubled host below
Wails loud in mickle woe,
Amaze fills all the valley,
And dread and disarray.

XXIX.

Down on the broken leaguer
Bethulia rushes eager,
And Judah's spear is crimson
With Assur's bravest blood ;
The glaive of Galilee
Empurples all her sea,
And proud Damascus trembles
By red Abana's flood.

XXX.

For sorrow and affright,
Great joyance and delight,
For ashes, flow'ry garlands
Hath glad Bethulia now ;
With timbrel, dance, and song,
Her maids and matrons throng
To bind a wreath of olive
On Judith's noble brow.

XXXI.

“ The Assyrian came forth
From his mountains in the north”—
’Twas thus the women chanted
And clash’d their cymbals ever,—
“ And great was his array
That came to spoil and slay,
And none there was, he vaunted,
Should shield us or deliver.”

XXXII.

“ But by the hand of woman
Our God hath foil'd the foeman,
It was no mighty champion
That wrought his captain's shame ;
Our gentle Judith smote
The faulchion through his throat,
And Israel aye shall glory
In the glory of her name.”

THE END.

X

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